



H O M E S T E A D S

Farm Security Administration
United States Department of Agriculture

During the depths of the depression more than one million farm families were forced to turn to the Government for help. Many of them had lost everything they owned through natural calamities, such as floods or prolonged droughts. Many others had been ruined by long-neglected evils in our agricultural system -- unscientific one-crop farming, the collapse of farm prices, unsound tenure systems, and the destruction of millions of acres of soil by erosion.

The task of the Farm Security Administration is to help these people get off the relief rolls and become permanently self-supporting. Often all they need to get a new start is a little financial help, coupled with guidance in sound farming practices. In such cases, the Farm Security Administration makes each family a small loan, under careful supervision, for the purchase of seed, tools, livestock, and other equipment needed to carry on farming operations. More than 800,000 families who could not get adequate credit elsewhere have received such aid; and already they have paid back more than \$128,000,000 into the Federal Treasury.

Sometimes, however, it is impossible to rehabilitate needy farm people by this method alone. Many families had become stranded in worn-out farming areas, cut-over forests, or exhausted mining communities. They could never make a decent living where they were; they had no money with which to make a new start on better land.

The Farm Security Administration has helped about 15,700 such families -- or more than 75,000 men, women, and children -- to establish new homes on land capable of producing a decent living. They are getting a new start on 164 projects, scattered through virtually every state.

In its program of resettling these families, the Farm Security Administration has sought to demonstrate better patterns of farming and rural community life. Each community project generally offers either an improved relationship between the farmer and the land, or the recognized advantages of community organization, or both.

The homestead plan is simple: the Government buys good land, builds inexpensive but adequate homes and outbuildings, and gives the settlers advice on the best farming methods. In some cases the residents rent their new farms; in other cases they buy them outright, spreading their payments over a 40-year period. The Government will be paid back most of the money it has invested; many of the projects, in other words, are self-liquidating.

There are two kinds of these projects:

1. Rural Communities, consisting of a number of farm homes clustered together with their own school, store, and sometimes other community facilities, such as a cotton gin. In most of these communities each family

makes its living by full time farming. In others the farms are small in size and provide only part of the families' livelihood. Various trades and industries, either on the project or nearby, furnish the rest.

2. Scattered Farmsteads, established in rural areas where schools, stores, and other facilities already are adequate. In most cases the government merely repaired buildings and fences, arranged for the re-located family to buy or rent the farm on reasonable terms, and provided advice on sound farming practices.

In addition, a few projects are a combination of the community and scattered types.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

In some areas a single farm family, operating a forty or fifty acre tract, cannot afford to use the most modern and efficient farming methods. Its acreage may not be large enough to justify the use of a tractor or other heavy machinery; pure-bred sires may be too expensive for its small herds of livestock.

As a result the small, individual farm is being gradually displaced in these areas by giant mechanized farms — "outdoor food factories," functioning with all the impersonal efficiency of a steel mill. Often they are operated, not by a self-reliant farm family, but by a corporation hiring a swarm of wandering seasonal laborers. They are built, not around the traditional farm home, but around a tool shed crowded with tractors and gang plows. Such mechanized farms already have taken over wide stretches of the wheat belt. They are steadily spreading in the fruit and vegetable areas of the West Coast. With the development of increasingly efficient cotton-cultivating machinery, they are beginning to take root in the South.

The small farmer, operating the old-fashioned forty acres and a mule, probably could not hope to survive for long in areas where this kind of large-scale, mechanized farming is more efficient. If a number of small farmers band together, however, they can take advantage of these modern, large-scale methods — and at the same time preserve the traditional values of independent farm ownership.

This is the principle which the Farm Security Administration has tried to follow in the establishment of its community farms. The way in which they operate is well illustrated by its project at Lake Dick, Arkansas, 60 miles southeast of Little Rock.

Here 80 families have established homes on 3,669 acres of fertile land. Each family has its own individual tract, on which it raises vegetables, poultry, and other supplies for its own use. Much of the acreage, however, is set aside for the production of cash crops under a co-operative farming arrangement. The co-operative, including every family in its membership, has purchased modern, efficient equipment for raising cotton, sweet potatoes, soy beans, sugar sorghum, peanuts, corn,

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In 1787, a convention was held in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. This led to the signing of the Constitution in 1787, which established the current form of the federal government.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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and other crops. It follows a scientific farm management plan, designed to halt erosion and build up the fertility of the soil.

Additional economies are achieved by raising dairy cows, hogs and work stock on a co-operative basis. In this way everyone benefits from the use of pure-bred sires -- which no single farmer could afford -- and a few large barns can be used instead of many smaller but more expensive structures. Still further savings result from the co-operative use of a sweet potato curing shed, a meat-curing plant, a syrup mill, and a stock feed mill. A general store and community building, where church services and other meetings can be held, round out the community.

Aside from the economic benefits, the residents in such communities enjoy many advantages which they had never known before. Their children are within easy reach of schools. Electric service is available at far cheaper rates than would be possible for widely-scattered homesteads. They can enjoy countless little amenities which are commonplace to city dwellers, but almost unknown on isolated farms.

The total cost of the Lake Dick project was \$566,809, which includes \$227,531 for the 80 farm homes and their acre-and-a-half garden tracts; \$164,249 for the farm land and buildings; and \$175,027 for the utilities and community center building. The average house cost including labor, overhead and materials was \$2,388.

The cooperative association formed by the homesteaders has leased the land and buildings from the Farm Security Administration.

SCATTERED FARMSTEADS

In other areas, where small, individual farms are still able to compete economically, the government has found it cheaper to re-establish handicapped farm families on scattered farms than in a single community. In many such cases, the lands have been acquired more economically than big tracts could have been.

These developments are known as infiltration projects, because the re-established families are scattered through an already settled area, and use the community facilities already available. Instead of operating community farms, and using community machinery, they are set up as individual farmers on their own establishments. In some instances, however, several of these families have been close enough together to co-operate in the purchase and use of more expensive equipment.

Generally, the farms are rented to the farm families until they demonstrate their ability to operate them soundly. Once they have proved their ability, with advice from the government experts, they are offered the opportunity to purchase the land. This type of project has now given way to the long range program for helping farm tenants buy farms for themselves under the Bankhead-Jones Act.

An example of how this kind of a project operates is provided by the North Carolina Farm Tenant Security project, located in five eastern counties of North Carolina. Here the government purchased scattered farms containing a total of about 7,500 acres and divided them into units for 89 families.

Families relocated on the project had lived in the area, but had found that because of their tenure conditions, or for other reasons, they could not reach the "American standard" of living. All were cotton or tobacco tenant farmers.

Units on this project vary in size from 30 to 192 acres, but average about 78. Available buildings were repaired, and in some instances new ones were built. In addition the families were loaned enough money to get new starts. They got loans averaging \$550 for the purchase of feed, seed, fertilizer, livestock, work animals and subsistence.

Here, as in its other programs, the Farm Security Administration provided supervision as well as cash. Each farmer was helped to prepare a farm plan for rotating crops, raising subsistence crops, and cash crops. A trained home economist helped the housewife to budget the family money and food supply.

Total cost of developing the North Carolina Farm Tenant Security project was \$514,009, of which \$215,165 was spent for construction. The 89 families, both white and Negro, have been re-established at an average cost of \$5,775. Their farm plans provide for repayment of this expenditure to the government, in addition to a higher standard of living for the families themselves.

SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEADS

Included among the rural communities, described on page two, are 33 projects started in 1933 by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads of the Department of Interior. These projects were taken over by the Resettlement Administration in June, 1935 and passed under the jurisdiction of the Farm Security Administration in September, 1937.

Some of these communities are entirely farming communities. Others are known as subsistence homesteads and the residents depend upon both farming and industry for their livelihood.

Nearly all of these projects have been completed, and 17 of them have been turned over for management to non-profit associations formed by the residents.

These associations take title to the property, and give a mortgage to the Government. They are responsible for the collection of individual payments from the homesteaders, for managing and maintaining the community, and for paying off the debt to the Government. The communities are incorporated under the laws of their respective states and are subject to

taxation just like any other village.

A fairly typical subsistence homestead project is Longview Homesteads, three miles west of Longview, Washington. Here 60 low-income families have found it possible to purchase modest but comfortable homes with monthly payments comparable to their previous rental charges.

Working in nearby Longview for average incomes of \$1,199, the family heads have been able to supplement their incomes and raise their living standards by producing much of their own food on individual farmsteads averaging a little bigger than two acres.

Each family has a frame house equipped with running water, septic tank, and electricity. Each unit has a garage with additional space for storage and a combination cow shed and chicken house. Small orchards, with 23 fruit trees each, are also provided for every family.

This project, initiated by the Subsistence Homesteads Division of the Department of the Interior, was completed in the fall of 1935. Total costs of the homestead were \$194,952 including \$28,200 for the 141 acres of land. The average cost of the 60 houses including labor, materials, and overhead was \$2,254. The average homestead unit including land, house, and outbuildings, cost \$3,025.

The project was turned over to a non-profit community association in May, 1936. Occupants of the units have contracted to pay the association an average of \$17.55 monthly, which will amortize their debts over a 40-year period.

GREENBELT COMMUNITIES

Three of the Farm Security Administration's projects come under still another category. They are the Greenbelt towns, developed in suburban areas for low-income families in Washington, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee.

These three communities, developed for the dual purpose of providing employment, and demonstrating an improved type of community planning, contain 2,258 family units. The project near Cincinnati includes 62 farm units, the one near Milwaukee contains 63; but primarily the projects are designed to provide modest, modern homes for low-income families.

Most of the stores in these communities are operated on a cooperative basis. The towns have all been incorporated.

Out of the rentals collected at each of the towns the Farm Security Administration makes payments in lieu of taxes to the local, county, and state governments.

LOW CONSTRUCTION COSTS

The low cost of construction on the homestead developments is largely the result of improved building methods. Farm Security Adminis-

tration engineers have worked out a system of pre-cutting and pre-fabrication on a mass production basis, which makes it possible to build sturdy, attractive rural homes for as little as \$250 a room.

Construction of the earliest projects was started under the pressure of a national emergency, to provide speedy employment for thousands of men on the relief rolls. Under such circumstances it was inevitable that the cost of building some of the first homes should be undesirably high.

When the Resettlement Administration was incorporated in the Department of Agriculture on January 1, 1937, immediate steps were taken to reduce construction costs to an absolute minimum. It was determined that the construction costs of a farm unit, including home and out-buildings, should be limited to between \$2,900 and \$4,200. The higher cost units are located in the Northern States, where more insulation and weather protection is necessary. All buildings are of the highest quality construction, and with reasonable maintenance should last considerably longer than the period required to amortize their cost.

In general, homes with bath and other plumbing cost approximately \$400 a room, while homes without bath cost only about \$250 a room. Barns cost from \$450 to \$1,800, depending on the number of animals to be housed. Some variation from these limits has been permitted in a few cases to meet special local conditions.

The first step in producing homes at such a low cost was to work out scientific plans and specifications, which would give the maximum amount of space and utility for the smallest possible expenditure. Every unnecessary gable, beam, and rafter was eliminated, as well as all purely decorative features. Standard materials and sizes were used throughout.

Designs of this type made possible a large degree of pre-cutting and pre-fabrication. A small portable sawmill, for example, was set up on the project site, to cut lumber for a large number of similar houses according to exact specifications. A truck then delivered these pieces to the building site, where they were speedily nailed together. Complicated parts, such as window and door frames, were prefabricated at the mill, so they could be installed with a minimum of labor. Even forms for pouring concrete foundations were made at the mill. Painted inside with creosote before each pouring, each one could be used six or seven times.

Pre-cutting at the sawmill takes only about one-sixth of the time which would be required for cutting with handsaws at the building site. It also assures machine precision, and makes possible more uniform supervision. Selection of stock is simplified, so that odds and ends of lumber which ordinarily would go on the scrap heap can be put to good use.

These methods made it practicable to use relatively unskilled rural relief labor, without lowering the standards of workmanship. Whenever

possible, the homes were built by the people who were to live in them and pay for them; they had every incentive to keep labor costs low.

Nearly all of the rural homes, with the exception of a few adobe buildings in the Southwest were constructed of lumber, since this material is best adapted to the pre-cutting technique. The best quality of materials was used throughout. Interior finishing is very simple. In the South, the inside walls usually are made of vertical tongue-and-groove wooden sheathing; in the North, plastered walls and weatherboard exteriors were necessary to cope with the more severe weather conditions. The ceilings of Northern houses are insulated, while the roof peaks of Southern houses are vented to permit a maximum circulation of air.

As a result of the experience gained on these homestead projects, farm houses are now being erected under the Tenant Purchase program of the Farm Security Administration at an average cost of \$1313.

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The 15,700 rural homes completed, or under development by the Farm Security Administration are only a beginning. Hundreds of thousands of farm families can never hope to reach our American standard of living until they get a new start on good land. Even in prosperous 1929, for example, more than 1,700,000 farm families were existing on an average annual income of only \$450 a year -- and that sum included all the food they raised for their own use, and the rent they paid for their farms.

The Farm Security Administration does not now plan to start additional projects; but it believes that its 164 farm and part-time farm projects may point the way toward a solution of one of the Nation's gravest agricultural problems.

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